

# Consumer responses to influencer marketing on Instagram.

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## Certificate of original authorship

I, Anna Segova, declare that this thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Arts (Research) in Humanities and Social Sciences in the School of Communication at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work, unless otherwise reference or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

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I would also like to acknowledge the editing advice I have received from Terry Fitzgerald and Suzanne Eggins, who helped me prepare this thesis for submission.

## Preface

This dissertation explores the topic *Consumer responses to influencer marketing on Instagram*. The basis of this thesis is a survey and series of interviews on consumer attitudes to influencers and sponsored content on Instagram, conducted on a sample group of undergraduate university students. It has been written to fulfil the graduation requirements of the Communications Program at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS). I was engaged in researching and writing this dissertation from January 2018 to January 2020.

My research question was formulated with my supervisor, James Meese. The research was challenging, but conducting an extensive investigation has allowed me to answer the research questions that were identified.

I would like to thank my supervisors, James Meese and Susie Khamis, for their guidance and support throughout this process. I would also like to express my gratitude to all of the respondents who gave their time to participate in this project. Without their participation, I would not have been able to conduct this analysis.

I hope you enjoy your reading.

Anna Segova

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## Abstract

In light of the emergence and mainstreaming of the influencer industry, it has become increasingly important to understand how consumers respond to influencer marketing techniques. Academic research has previously focused on how influencers interact with their audiences, and little to no work has spoken directly to consumers about their views on influencers and sponsored content on Instagram. Focusing on what this trend means to those who actively engage with influencers, this thesis examines how Australian consumers respond to influencers and influencer marketing on Instagram through mixed-methods research. The thesis reveals that consumers prefer sponsored content over traditional online and offline advertising techniques. One of the main reasons for this preference is the personal relationship that consumers are able to establish with influencers. This research demonstrates high levels of media literacy among consumers and their confidence in recognising sponsored content, even when ad intent is undisclosed. Additionally, this thesis shows that a promotional tone of voice undermines message credibility more than ad disclosure. This paper extends our knowledge of contemporary online marketing by providing a comprehensive account of how consumers react to influencer marketing on Instagram and in turn provides new insights into the consumer–influencer relationship.